

Video Reveals Threat of “Wholesale Transfer and Privatization of America’s Public Lands” on Trump’s Agenda, Says Watchdog Group

The event in question, which took place June 2019 and was hosted by the Interior Department, featured a keynote address by climate-denier Myron Ebell.

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Watchdog group Western Values Project said Friday that audio it obtained of a June 2019 event at Trump’s Interior Department provides more [evidence](#) that public lands are under threat of being privatized by the former reality star and his crew of “anti-public land zealots.”

The [event](#) (pdf) in question was the American Agri-Women Symposium entitled “Federal Land Policies: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly,” which took place at Interior’s Sidney Yates Auditorium. [Myron Ebell](#)—the climate crisis-denying former head of President Trump’s EPA transition team who serves as head of environmental and energy policy at the Competitive Enterprise Institute—was keynote speaker.

HuffPost, with whom Western Values Project shared the video, described the remarks as “a 40-minute rambling assault” on the agency where the event was taking place.

As *HuffPost* [reported](#), two other high level Interior officials also gave speeches at the symposium: Brenda Burman, commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation, and Andrea Travnicek, deputy assistant secretary of land and minerals management.

Ebell was introduced by the Interior Department’s Susan Combs, Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management, and Budget. [Combs](#) is an anti-government, Endangered Species Act foe who’s taken in as much as \$2.1 million from oil and gas royalties on her property.

In his remarks, Ebell took swipes at the Land and Water Conservation Fund and National Park Service and suggested the government has “a constant incentive to fail.”

Privatization, he made clear, is the approach he favored for federal lands. From *HuffPost*:

“I think the real solution to the federal lands is eventually to either transfer them to the states or,” he paused to acknowledge two lawmaker friends who don’t support the second option he was about to mention, “privatize them, put them into private ownership.”

He shared a Power Point Presentation that included his desire—since [fulfilled](#) by the Trump administration—to weaken the Endangered Species Act.

HuffPost added:

Shifting to lands already under federal control, Ebell fumbled to locate a slide about transferring and selling off lands in the West. Undeterred, he declared that the “ultimate solution” was being championed by Ken Ivory, a former Republican state representative from Utah and longtime leader of the pro-land-transfer movement, and the American Lands Council. The Utah-based nonprofit, which Ivory co-founded in 2012 and led until 2016, advocates for the “timely and orderly transfer of federal public lands to willing states for local control that will provide better public access, better environmental health, and better economic productivity.”

Ebell praised Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, a former fossil fuel lobbyist, and his deregularly approach. Ebell also confirmed that he’d met with Bernhardt during “chance encounters” at the department—a phrasing Western Values Project said could be evidence of Bernhardt’s strategy for [keeping secret](#) his meetings with ethical question-posing figures.

“It is clear that selling off and privatizing America’s public lands has been part of the Trump administration’s agenda since day one. Now, with the completion of historic rollbacks to public land protections, all at the behest of their corporate pals, appeasing anti-public land zealots is next up on the list,” said Jayson O’Neill, deputy director of Western Values Project, in a statement.

“This is another indicator that if President Trump and Secretary Bernhardt are given enough time, the wholesale transfer and privatization of America’s public lands will happen in the blink of an eye. Once our public lands are gone,” he warned, “they’re gone for good.”

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